

Rays From the Rose Cross Magazine

Lavender Pencils by Dagmar Frahme

Molly and Margie, who were exactly six years old, looked exactly alike. Their brown hair curled exactly alike. Their blue eyes twinkled exactly alike. Their noses turned up exactly alike. Their laughs tinkled exactly alike. Their dresses and their coats and their shoes and their socks and even their brand new notebooks for Miss Duncan's first grade class were exactly the same colors.

But nobody ever had trouble telling Molly and Margie apart.

Molly's hair was brushed and hung neatly to her shoulders. Margie's hair often looked as though a bird had tried to make a nest in it. Molly kept her shoelaces

tied. Margie's shoelaces often flopped along the ground behind her.

Molly washed her face and brushed her teeth without being told. Margie almost always had to be told, and even then her face often looked as though she had been eating chocolate pudding. Molly always hung up her clothes and put her toys away. Margie usually left her toys on the floor and her clothes all over her room, and even Daddy, Mother, and Molly *together* couldn't get her to put them away.

At school, Molly printed neatly and carefully, drew pictures without smudges, and kept her desk tidy. Margie could print carefully, but usually didn't. She almost always smudged her pictures and got crayon all over her hands. Miss Duncan asked her to clean out her desk at least once a week, but always, a day later, it was full of stones from the playground, crumpled up papers, and books from the reading table that she had forgotten to put back.

When Molly and Margie went to a party, Margie usually spilled ice cream on her dress or milk on the tablecloth. Molly almost never spilled anything. When Molly and Margie went shopping with Mother, Margie often lost her hair ribbon or her bracelet or her purse. Molly almost never lost anything.

When Molly and Margie went to the library, Margie often dropped a book or tore a page or giggled so loudly that the librarian had to ask her to leave. Molly almost never dropped or tore anything and she certainly never giggled in the library.

Molly was teaming to make clothes for her dolls. She knew how to cut the material neatly and make nice, even stitches. Margie knew how to do those things, but didn't try to do them. She cut the material too fast and ruined it. Her stitches were sloppy, because she didn't watch what she was doing.

One morning Molly and Margie each found a brand new lavender pencil next to her plate at breakfast. Mother had them in her drawer and thought that Molly and Margie could use them at school. The children in Miss Duncan's room had yellow pencils and red pencils and green pencils, but nobody had a lavender pencil.

Molly and Margie couldn't wait to show their pencils to the other children. Molly put hers into her school bag so it wouldn't get lost. Margie carried hers in her hand so she could look at it all the way to school.

"You'd better put your pencil in your school bag, Margie," said Mother. "Otherwise you might lose it."

"I won't lose it," said Margie.

"Don't carry it like that," said Molly. "You'll lose it."

"I won't lose it ,'" said Margie.

The girls hurried to school. Margie bumped into a tree, a fence, a man hurrying to catch his bus, and Molly, because she was looking so hard at the new pencil she didn't watch where she was going.

"Very don't you watch where you're going, kid?" asked the man angrily.

Margie looked hard at her pencil and didn't answer.

"Look out, will you?" said Molly disgustedly.

Margie looked hard at her pencil and didn't answer.

Margie was still looking at her pencil when she tripped over a stone on the sidewalk and fell, landing on her knees and her chin at the same time. The pencil rolled out of her hand into the bushes.

Margie's knees were bleeding and her chin was going to be black and blue for a long time, but she didn't care about that.

"Where's my pencil?" she wailed.

If you put it in your school bag like Mother said you wouldn't have lost it," said Molly, who did not feel too sympathetic.

Margie didn't want to hear Molly's lecture about the school bag. She wanted her pencil.

"Here's my pencil?" she wailed again. "Help me look for it."

"I don't want to be late," said Molly, "and you'd better not be either. Come on."

"No," said Margie. "I'm going to find my pencil."

So Molly went on to school, and Margie looked and looked and looked for the pencil. Finally she found it, just as the school bell rang.

Margie ran as fast as she could the rest of the way, but everyone was already in his seat when she got to her classroom, all out of breath.

"Oh, Margie," said Miss Duncan. "What did you do to yourself now? Go to the office and let the nurse clean you up."

So Margie went to the office and let the nurse clean up her knees and her chin. When she got back to her

room, Miss Duncan was explaining something on the blackboard, so Margie did not get a chance to show anyone her lavender pencil.

While other children were reading, Margie did not do her work because she was too busy looking at her pencil. During arithmetic Miss Duncan watched her so she did do her work. But while she worked she chewed her pencil, and soon there were teeth marks all over it and the eraser was sopping wet. Then she erased her paper with the wet eraser and smeared it so badly that Miss Duncan couldn't read her answers.

"Margie," said Miss Duncan, "if your work paper doesn't look much better than this tomorrow, I am going to start keeping you after school until you learn to do neater work. There is no excuse for being so sloppy."

Margie looked sadly down at her pencil. When Miss Duncan said she was going to keep someone after school, she meant it. Margie would have to hand in a very neat paper tomorrow.

The new pencil didn't look so new anymore. Margie pushed it among the many things stuffed into her desk and went outside for recess.

When she came back she found the point broken because she had not put the pencil away carefully. She pushed it into the pencil sharpener harder than she should have, and the pencil was much shorter when she finished sharpening it.

By the time school was over, Margie had chewed the pencil some more even though she had not really meant to. It looked old and beaten up instead of new and beautiful. Margie put it sadly back into her desk.

Molly's pencil looked just as new as when she had found it on the break-fast table. Molly put it into her school bag.

"Aren't you taking your pencil home?" Molly asked.

"No," said Margie.

"Why not?"

"Because."

And try as she would, Molly could not get Margie to say anything except "because."

"Did you girls have a nice day at school?" asked Mother when they got home.

"I had a really fun day," said Molly. "Everybody liked my new pencil. They all want one the same color."

Molly took her pencil out of her school bag and looked at it proudly.

"Where's your pencil, Margie?" asked Mother.

"At school," said Margie gloomily, wishing they would stop talking about the pencil.

"She chewed her pencil and got teeth marks on it and broke it and it looks terrible," said Molly.

"Oh, why did you have to tell?" asked Margie. She went outside and pressed her forehead against the fence, hoping nobody would know that there were tears in her eyes.

After a while, Mother called her inside.

"You feel terrible about your pencil, don't you, Honey?" asked Mother.

Margie nodded. Why did Mother have to keep talking about the pencil?

"I know you didn't want it to look bad. Why did you chew it?"

"I dunno," mumbled Margie.

"Could it be because you weren't thinking?" asked Mother.

"I guess so," said Margie.

"And you weren't thinking when you stuffed it into your desk and you weren't thinking when you fell down with it this morning either, were you?"

"Did Molly tell you that?"

"She did because I asked her to," said Mother, drawing Margie onto her lap. "Honey, we're all getting worried about you. There seem to be so many times when you don't think. You don't think about how you look, and you don't think about being careful with things you could spill or drop. You don't think about being neat, and you don't even think about watching where you are going. What *do* you think about?"

"Oh," said Margie, trying to think about what she did think about. "I think about stories and going to the woods with Daddy and what my dolls are doing and - and - things like that."

"How do you feel when you think those things?" asked Mother.

"I feel good," said Margie.

"Do you feel good when you fall on your chin or chew up your pencil or when people say your face is dirty or your work IS messy?"

Margie shook her head.

"Doesn't that tell you anything?" asked Mother.

Margie swung one leg back and forth and wriggled. Mother held her firmly

"That I should think about what I'm doing," finally whispered Margie, who had heard that many times before.

Mother pushed Margie gently from her lap and said, "Come with me. I want to show you something."

Mother went to her desk and took something out of a drawer. Margie's eyes widened. It was another lavender pencil just as pretty as her own had been that morning.

"Would you like to have it?" asked Mother.

"*Could* I?" asked Margie, not believing her ears.

"If you promise that you will try as hard as you can to think about the things you are doing and the things

you should be doing."

Margie sighed. She knew that promise would not be easy to keep, but she wanted the pretty new pencil so badly!

"I promise," she said.

"All right, Dear," said Mother, handing her the pencil. "Take good care of it."

Next morning Margie put the new pencil in her school bag. She had made her bed - something that Mother would be very surprised to see after breakfast - and brushed her hair especially well. At school, she cleaned out her desk before the first bell rang. Miss Duncan was very surprised to see *that*.

She did her work very carefully. Her arithmetic paper did have one little smudge in the corner, but Miss Duncan didn't seem to notice. "What a nice, neat paper, Margie," she said instead.

Once Margie stopped thinking for a minute and started to chew her pencil, but she remembered in time to take it out of her mouth before she got teeth marks on it. She broke the point once but sharpened it carefully so that it was *almost* as long as before.

When it was time to go home, Margie put the pencil in her school bag, put her books back on the reading table, and made sure there were no crumpled papers in her desk.

"I wonder what has gotten into that child," said Miss Duncan to herself after everyone had gone.

When Margie got home, she sat down at the kitchen table and didn't move. "In a minute," she said to Molly, who wanted her to go outside and play.

"Why are you so tired, Honey?" asked Mother, setting a glass of orange juice down in front of her.

"I'm tired from *thinking*," said Margie.

"Oh," said Mother, smiling. "Are you sorry you thought so much?"

"No, I'm not sorry," said Margie. "I feel much gooder than yesterday."

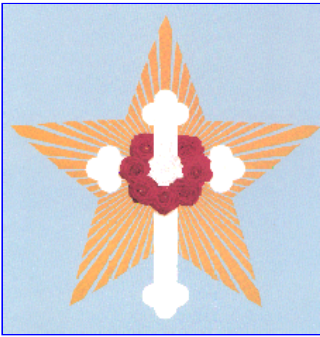
"Better," corrected Mother gently.

"Better," said Margie, and smiled at the big glass of orange juice as she picked it up.

—*Rays from the Rose Cross Magazine, May, 1975, p. 237-240*

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